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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 002979

SIPDIS

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TAGS: TBIO PTER TSPL ETTC PK
SUBJECT: BIOSECURITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM HELPS STRENGTHEN S&T COLLABORATION IN PAKISTAN

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Biosecurity Engagement Program team's second visit to Pakistan June 12-23 further strengthened the collaboration on the Science and Technology Agreement, part of the Strategic Dialogue between Pakistan and the U.S. The team met with high-level GOP officials and various members of Pakistan's scientific community over the two-week visit which included four bio-safety and security workshops that trained over 700 scientists and lab workers. Each meeting elicited common needs from various sectors of the scientific community, as well as concerns that there had been little movement on the S&T dialogue since the first high-level committee meeting in Washington in February. The team hopes to establish a program office in Islamabad in order to move quickly on funding programs to build Pakistan's bio-safety and security capacity. End Summary

24 MEETINGS AND 4 WORKSHOPS IN 8 DAYS

¶2. (U) On June 12, Jason Rao and Kendra Chittenden from ISN/CTR, Martha Mummey and Muquarrab Qureshi from USDA, and Steven Clark from EPA began a whirlwind round of meetings with representatives from the Ministries of Health (MOH), Environment, Science and Technology (MOST), and Food, Agriculture and Livestock (MINFAL). In addition, they met with scientists from Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC); Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR); Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR). In Lahore they met with the Centers for Excellence in Microbiology; King Edward Medical University; University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences; Institute of Public Health; Veterinary Research Institute and Aga Khan University in Karachi.

¶3. (U) The Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP) team was joined by Reynolds Salerno of Sandia National Labs, Robert Hawley of the American Biological Safety Association, and Joseph Kozlovac of USDA to conduct bio-safety and security workshops from June 18 to 21. Over 700 scientists and lab workers attended the four separate

workshops conducted in Islamabad and Karachi. Participation was lively, the questions insightful, and all agreed the workshops were a success.

LABS IN DESPERATE NEED OF TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT

¶4. (SBU) The BEP team was able to visit several labs, most of which were inadequately handling the deadly pathogens housed there. The tuberculosis lab at King Edward Medical University contained multi-drug resistant (MDR) tuberculosis virus that was being handled without proper bio-safety techniques, such as gloves, masks and lab coats. The situation at the Veterinary Research Institute (VRI) was slightly better. VRI produces 21 different animal vaccines, including H5N1 (the most highly-pathogenic variant of avian influenza) and anthrax. Even though they have bio-safety level two (BSL2) capabilities, it is still considered inadequate given the toxicity of the pathogens housed there. The BEP team invited representatives from each of these labs to the workshops and donated personal protective equipment (PPE) to the lab at King Edward Medical University.

COMMON THEMES

¶5. (SBU) There were four common themes that ran through the meetings with both government and science representatives:

-- Training - every Ministry and scientific institution said it was critical that Pakistani scientists have the ability to train for three to six months at labs in the U.S., in addition to bringing U.S. scientists to Pakistan to lecture students and train lab personnel.

-- Guidance - government representatives and the scientific

community requested help in drafting appropriate laws, lab protocols, bio-safety guidelines, and designing BSL3 labs.

-- Capacity building - everyone the team met with requested help with capacity building. This includes infrastructure, such as better water and sewer pipes to prevent the contamination of drinking water, and lab equipment.

-- Public/private partnerships - the scientific community was very aware that the government cannot provide for all their needs and that the key is to build partnerships with corporations with an interest in developing Pakistan as an outsourcing market for research, development and production.

PAKISTAN CONCERNED OVER PACE OF PROGRESS

¶6. (SBU) During meetings with officials from MOH, MOST and MINFAL, concerns were raised at the pace of progress in the S&T dialogue. The Pakistanis believed they had presented several areas of potential collaboration that were still awaiting U.S. response. Rao highlighted the work his team had done in training lab workers, and the fact that he had brought a water expert, Clark, to consult with PCRWR on ways to improve Pakistan's drinking water, fulfilling the agreement for training and collaboration. During the discussion of next steps, each Ministry requested assistance from the U.S. with road maps and time tables.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) It was clear from the meetings that the GOP and the Pakistani scientific community have high hopes for the S&T dialogue; however they have concerns about the pace of progress. Although the BEP team does not technically fall under the S&T dialogue agreement, the work they are doing is furthering scientific collaboration and exchange. Rao intends to explore the possibility of establishing a program office in Islamabad in order to facilitate funding of projects which meet BEP goals in Pakistan. Post will work closely

with Rao on this project in addition to highlighting areas where the S&T dialogue is progressing. End Comment

Patterson